

THE CHURCH, LIFE, AND MARRIAGE

You have been quite patient in putting up with the most recent issues of Lifewatch. More and more, it seems, the articles in the newsletter have focused on issues related to the Church catholic and to The United Methodist Church. We admit that, for two reasons, we are thinking long and hard about the Church, including The United Methodist Church, these days. First, because some of those committed to changing United Methodist doctrine and discipline on human sexuality are disrupting, and deepening the divide within, the denomination. And second, because the Commission on a Way Forward is trying to find a way out of this ecclesiastical mess. With the disruption and the Commission going on, Lifewatch's concentration on the Church seems to make good sense to us.

There is a third reason to be giving much attention to the Church in Lifewatch. The Church, as the People of God, through the ages, has been a sturdy community, gathered and guided and judged by Jesus Christ, enlivened and sustained by the Holy Spirit, kept faithful and renewed by the witness of Scripture. God raised up the Church, this community, to be His people and to do His will in this world, through time, for the sake of this world. From its very beginning, the Church has taught, preached, and practiced for life and against abortion. Likewise, from its very beginning, the Church has taught, preached, and practiced that the gift of human sexuality is to be reserved for the covenant of marriage. So the Church, life, and marriage go together.

DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE

In the four gospels of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the word church (*ekklesia* in the Greek) is used only three times by Jesus. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declares: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (NRSV) Here Jesus employs the word church just after hearing Peter’s confession—“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (16:16) That is, Jesus teaches that being the Church means having a confession; and it is obvious that having a confession means having doctrine.

Later, in Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus employs the word church twice: “If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (NRSV) Here Jesus makes clear that being the Church means having procedures for reconciling—in other words, having discipline.

Therefore, according to our Lord Jesus Christ, as reported by Matthew, His Church requires doctrine and discipline. The Church is not about choices. Shopping is about choices. Voting is about choices. Entertaining is about choices. But when it comes to foundational matters, the Church is about doctrine and discipline. (Again, we have that on good authority.) The Church is about protecting the life of the little one and her mother—not defending the choice to abort the little one and harm the mother. The Church is about training and channeling sexual desires—not choosing how they can be fulfilled as often as possible, in as many ways as imaginable. So the Church of Jesus Christ is about doctrine and discipline, both of which involve life and human sexuality.

Long before the Republican Party in the United States existed. Long before social conservatism in the West had developed. Long before John Wesley ministered, the Church was constituted and established by Jesus Christ. From its beginning, Christ’s Church was dedicated to (not resistant to) doctrine and discipline—including doctrine and discipline on moral matters related to life and human sexuality. Church, life, and marriage—they go together. That is why Lifewatch is talking about the Church, including The United Methodist Church, these days.

Please allow one more point. What is happening in The United Methodist Church today looks like a crisis. However, through the eyes of faith, one can see a God-given opportunity for The United Methodist Church to become more fully Christ’s Church. That can occur only with struggle and growing pains. But the struggle and growing pains can, under God’s grace and providence and judgment, lead to a more faithful United Methodist Church, that is better fortified to face the challenges of the present and of the future (PTS)♥

A STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION AND THE BISHOPS

On August 25, 2017, a copy of “A Proposed Way Forward for The United Methodist Church: Being One, and Becoming More Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic” was mailed to each member of the Commission on a Way Forward and to each member of the Council of Bishops (resident and retired). As mentioned in the cover memo, “[t]his proposal urges that The United Methodist Church remain in covenantal unity—so that The United Methodist Church can then work through its challenges and, in doing so, increase in holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.... In other words, this proposal understands the current turmoil in The United Methodist Church to be a grand opportunity for our church to become more fully and faithfully Christ’s Church.” (PTS)

A PROPOSED WAY FORWARD FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:
BEING ONE, AND BECOMING MORE HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC

The Nicene Creed is one of God's greatest gifts to the Church. It declares the faith of the Church through the ages and around the world. It also states the four marks of the Church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These marks can assist the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops to plan and prepare for the future of The United Methodist Church.

1. Be one. The United Methodist Church is now in a state of disordered unity. Most United Methodists, including some bishops, have a casual attitude toward the church's doctrine and discipline. Bishops and clergy seldom teach, uphold, or defend what the church believes and practices. Many prefer their own opinions and dissent against current doctrine and discipline. A small group, with large impact, violates church discipline and thereby disrupts the entire church. Hence, the disorder. But this disorder is not formal division. The Church is the body of Christ—not a body of Christians. Therefore, there cannot be a negotiated separation (or schism) of The United Methodist Church. Nor can there be an agreed-upon segmentation of the church into two or three groups that would work together on some matters (e.g., pensions) and have their own way on other matters (e.g., sexual morality). In its worldwide vastness, as part of Christ's body and under His headship, and in line with The Baptismal Covenant, The United Methodist Church is, and should remain, in covenantal unity.

2. Become more holy. Set apart from the world by God's initiative, grace, and gift of baptism, the Church is holy. In the Wesleyan tradition, holiness is about love—divine love within the Triune God who reaches out to the world, and the church's love for God and for all people. The church's love for God includes her commitment to hear, trust, obey, and be transformed by the Word of God. The church's love for people requires her commitment to sacrifice for them for their genuine good, and challenge them to live holy, transformed lives that reflect Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. While making and abiding by difficult decisions, the church is deepened in holiness because she must fully depend on the Holy Spirit. Her witness to the world is also increased.

3. Become more catholic. The Church's doctrine and discipline are derived from Scripture. Therefore, church doctrine and discipline should aim to be consistent with the standard set by St. Vincent of Lerins (died c. 455): the Church proposes "what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." Recalling Scripture and this Vincentian standard, the Commission on a Way Forward should rewrite the sections of The Book of Discipline that relate to human sexuality. In its revision, the Commission should convey the God-created nature and purpose of human sexuality, specify the marital context for sexual expression, name all sexual sins, and describe the chaos unleashed by the commission of those sins.

4. Become more apostolic. The rewritten portions of the Discipline, after presentation to the Council of Bishops and adoption by the 2019 General Conference, should be taught to the entire United Methodist Church. The Council of Bishops should lead this teaching mission and start its teaching during

**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND
THESE ANNUAL EVENTS,
WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE
ON JANUARY 19, 2018 (FRIDAY),
AT THE UNITED METHODIST BUILDING
100 MARYLAND AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**9:30 a.m. LIFEWATCH SERVICE OF
WORSHIP**

The Reverend Dr. David F. Watson
preaching

Professor of New Testament, Vice President for
Academic Affairs and Academic Dean,
United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH

3:00 p.m. LIFEWATCH BOARD MEETING

**ORGANIZE A LARGE GROUP FROM YOUR
CHURCH TO ATTEND!**

the 2019 General Conference. Soon after the conclusion of General Conference 2019, the resident bishops throughout the church should teach their own clergy and laity—with the Gospel, in a loving, forgiving, and transforming way—what the Church through the ages, beginning with the Apostles, has taught about human sexuality. After all, the bishops have promised, and been consecrated, to teach and defend the church's doctrine and discipline—not their own opinions. Of course some United Methodists will dissent from this teaching; they will be allowed to do so, as long as their dissent remains within the boundaries of the church's discipline. But if some refuse to accept the church's doctrine, and they disrupt the church's order, their behavior will be grounds for their removal, according to the Discipline's stated due process, from the church. Clergy (including bishops), laity, congregations, districts, annual conferences, and jurisdictions could leave the church without retribution.

"Impossible!" it is said.

But with God, all things are possible.

Let us pray.

Merciful Father, send your Holy Spirit anew onto the Church militant being built by Christ—including that part called The United Methodist Church. Keep her in covenantal unity—even when dissent is strong and disobedience blatant. Bless her with greater holiness—greater love for you, for those in the church, and for all. Deepen the faith she preaches, teaches, and lives. And give her the courage of the Apostles of old to meet, with faith and resolve, the challenges of this time. Through Jesus Christ—the One crucified, risen, and coming again, the head of the Church—we pray. Amen.

Rev. Paul T. Stallworth
Lifewatch, President and Editor
Week of Pentecost XII
August 25, 2017

“WE BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH!”

That was the title of a conference on April 28 and 29. The conference was sponsored by the Wesleyan Covenant Association and held at Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN. Attended by over 500 worldwide United Methodists, the conference challenged us to understand the Church theologically—that is, to understand the Church through the eyes of the Christian faith.

This conference was long overdue. After all, as The United Methodist Church is experiencing many challenges, this was exactly the time to think faithfully and deeply about The United Methodist Church as a part of Christ’s Church. The conference was brilliantly planned. The conference followed The Nicene Creed’s declarations: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life... We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church...” That is, the conference was organized around the Holy Spirit and the four marks of the Church. The conference was well executed. The conference presentations and teaching were uniformly excellent. The conference contained worship that was faithful to the Gospel. And the conference sermons, by Bishop James Swanson (of the Mississippi Episcopal Area), offered Gospel truth and challenge to all the assembly.

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH’S FOUR MARKS

Dr. Jason E. Vickers, a theology professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, taught that the Holy Spirit is behind all the Church is and does. The Nicene Creed proclaims belief in God the Holy Spirit at the beginning of its third section—after the sections on God the Father and God the Son. Then the Church, which is named a bit later in the third section, is claimed as a visible result of the Spirit’s presence and power. So, the Church does not rely on human genius. The Church is not self-generating. The Church is not self-sustaining. The Church is not self-guiding. The Church is not self-renewing. For its origin and its everyday life and its mission and its guidance and its renewal, the Church depends on the Holy Spirit—who is “the giver of life” (The Nicene Creed) to the Church. So, the Church is not simply a social club, a political caucus, or a moral school. Essentially, the Holy Spirit leads the Church to witness to Jesus Christ, who through His death and resurrection reconciles the world to God the Father. This Gospel (Good News) has social, political, and educational implications for the Church. But those implications flow, with the Spirit’s help, from the Gospel; that is, they do not stand alone.

Dr. Chris Ritter, the directing pastor of several United Methodist churches in Illinois, spoke about the Church’s unity and its unity in Christian truth. He emphasized the Church’s “covenantal unity,” which mandates that its leaders speak the truth in love with the Spirit’s assistance. Yes, of course, the Church welcomes all. However, at the same time, the Church’s leaders are held to a higher doctrinal and moral standard. Leadership in the Church is about service, not entitlement.

Dr. Andrew Thompson, the senior pastor of First United Methodist Church in Springdale, AR, addressed the Church’s holiness. Because God is holy, the People of God is holy. As John Wesley made clear, holiness is all about love—sacrificial love for the genuine good of the one who is loved. According to Dr. Thompson, there are now two competing

definitions of holiness circulating in The United Methodist Church. One encourages each person, on his or her own, to decide what is holy love. Sadly, this elevation of individual choice makes the Church’s Biblical interpretation practically impossible. The other understanding of holiness relies on receiving the will of God from the Bible, assisted by Church tradition, reason, and experience. This understanding depends upon an openness, and obedience, to the Biblical witness.

Dr. William J. Abraham, the Outler professor at Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University), tackled what it means for the Church to be catholic. Often, United Methodists let catholic simply mean universal, as does the footnote on “catholic” in The Apostles’ Creed in The United Methodist Hymnal (p. 881). It is better, said Dr. Abraham, to understand catholic to mean “according to the whole.” So the Church’s catholic beliefs and practices are held by Christians around the world and through the ages—in other words, “according to the whole.” A crisis in a church forces that church to decide, and resolve its disagreement, “according to the whole.” United Methodists in our many conferences—General Conference, Annual Conference, and Charge Conference—should be well acquainted with deciding “according to the whole.” The Church catholic is a gift from God, a responsibility to meet, and a promise to hope for.

Rev. Carolyn Moore, the founding pastor of Mosaic Church in Evans, GA, presented on the Church being apostolic. To be an apostle is to be sent out by Jesus Christ. Because the Church is apostolic, “I do not get to decide what it means to follow our Lord,” said Rev. Moore. As The Letter of Jude makes clear—“contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3, NRSV)—the Church is apostolic because the Church’s faith is apostolic. Therefore, maintaining the Church in apostolicity requires leaders who firmly hold to the Church’s received faith. Those leaders must offer more than pastoral care and partisan politics to their people. At times, according to Saint Paul’s instruction to young Timothy, leaders must “get in there and fight for the faith.” Those fights will usually “take longer and cost more” than the leaders and people of the Church would prefer.

CHURCH TEACHING OVER DISSENTING OPINION

Insofar as the Church is Spirit-driven, the Church will be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic in real time—that is, through history and on the ground. Her unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity will not be perfect. She will fail. She will mess up. But the Church, because of God’s gift and help, will be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, more or less.

Because the Church knows of her own imperfection and incompleteness, the Church welcomes dissent that aims to correct and purify the Church’s faith and life. That is, the Church allows those who disagree with the Church’s message and governance to make their best case and attempt to change the Church’s message and governance. The Church treats dissenters with respect, and also expects the dissenters to abide by the Church’s discipline. The Church will hear the witness of those in dissent in the appropriate conferences, set it next to established teaching and practice, debate it, discern God’s word, will, and way, and decide what to do with the dissenters’ proposal (approve it as a faithful development of the Church’s faith and order, or reject it as contrary to the Church’s faith and order).

For nearly fifty years, those who want to alter the

Church's teaching on human sexuality have challenged The United Methodist Church through a persistent, dissenting witness. Since 1972, General Conferences, every four years, have welcomed this organized, vocal, well funded dissent. After considering this dissenting witness, General Conferences have consistently, without exception, voted to maintain traditional teaching on human sexuality in The United Methodist Church. Exactly that teaching remains The United Methodist Church's teaching. And not incidentally, exactly that teaching is the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church's teaching.

As noted above, a fifty-year dissent has challenged The United Methodist Church's established teaching. But this dissent has not displaced, demoted, or relativized The United Methodist Church's established teaching. That is, dissent has not reduced established Church teaching to a matter of opinions (all of which are assumed to be equally valid) for all the members of the Church. Rather, that established teaching, as stated in The Book of Discipline, remains The United Methodist Church's teaching, which is consistent with the teaching of the Church that is made possible by the Spirit's work and that is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

There is recent news about the Judicial Council's recent Decision 1431. The news is that the Judicial Council (The United Methodist Church's Supreme Court) is ruling according to church law stated in The Book of Discipline. That is, the Judicial Council is not deciding cases according to the preferred opinions of the women and men who sit on the Council. In Decision 1431, the Judicial Council ruled that the consecration of a person, who is practicing a homosexual lifestyle, to the office of bishop violates church law. In the case of Karen Oliveto, that happened last summer. So, according to the Judicial Council's ruling, she must now undergo judicial review as outlined by the Discipline and as reinforced by the Council. This rightly protects Karen Oliveto's church-constitutional right to due process; that is fair. (It should also be noted that at the time Decision 1431 was issued, the Judicial Council handed down other decisions, that had to do with human sexuality, that prove the Council's rulings are now being properly guided by the rule of law established by The Book of Discipline.)

A LAST WORD

So, with the presence and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The United Methodist Church has received Christian teaching on human sexuality (from "the faith once for all entrusted to the saints," Jude 3, NRSV). The United Methodist Church has invited dissent from this teaching for nearly fifty years. That dissent has not changed The United Methodist Church's teaching. The teaching remains. In place. And now that teaching is being upheld by the church's Judicial Council.

Church teaching remains Church teaching. Dissent remains dissent. Opinions remain opinions.

During the Memphis Conference on the Church, there was an incident that illustrates The United Methodist Church as its most faithful. Toward the end of one of the presentations, during the time for questions and comments, a person stood to challenge the presenter. This person, who dissented from the Church's teaching on human sexuality, was respected and encouraged to speak. But the points she raised were

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Now it is being applied to gender."*

thoughtfully answered. Dinner for all soon followed. As Marsha and I were walking to our dinner table, we passed by the person who had voiced dissent. She was sitting, at table, with a couple of the Conference presenters. The three of them were involved in earnest, civil conversation about the matters at hand. It was a meeting of the minds—in the service of the Church's faith. That is the best way dissent is expressed in the Church, and the best way the Church responds to dissent.

A PLEA FOR PRAYER

The United Methodist Church now awaits the final proposal(s) that will be formulated by the Commission on a Way Forward, how the Council of Bishops (COB) will tweak the final proposal(s), and how the special, called 2019 General Conference will respond to the COB proposal(s). General Conference will adopt, amend and adopt, amend and reject, or reject what the COB proposes.

Pray for the Commission on a Way Forward, for the Council of Bishops, and for the next General Conference. (PTS)♥

A FORK IN THE ROAD

Let us never forget the general culture in which we live. The commanding heights of Western culture—led by elite colleges and universities, reinforced by the mainstream media, propagated by popular movies and music, and enforced by the state—are engaged in a 24-7 assault on the mere idea of truth. A casualty of this continuous assault is the claim of moral truth. For decades, this assault on truth and moral truth has been ongoing.

The result: now, it is assumed by many (or most?), there is no truth; instead, there are many "truths" out there. You get your truth; I get my truth; everyone gets one's own truth; so all of us are left with only choices, an infinite numbers of choices, and no truth. This ideology of choice has been applied first to marriage (resulting in widespread divorce), then to pregnancy (resulting in widespread abortion), and next to human sexuality (resulting in legalized same-sex marriage). Now it is being applied to gender. As this ideology of choice spreads and deepens throughout Western societies, standing institutions and morality are severely tested day after day, for years.

Against this destructive development, in 1993, Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) stood up and offered a witness to truth. The occasion of his witness was the tenth encyclical, or authoritative teaching document, of his papacy. In Veritatis Splendor (or The Splendor of Truth), the formal title of his witness, the Pope pointed directly and powerfully to the existence of truth, including moral truth. There he made

powerful philosophical and theological arguments for the existence of truth, including moral truth.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the release of The Splendor of Truth, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Philadelphia, has written “The Splendor of Truth in 2017” (First Things, October 2017, pp. 21-26). There Archbishop Chaput summarizes The Splendor of Truth in this simple, straightforward way: “Truth exists, whether we like it or not. We don’t create truth; we find it, and we have no power to change it to our tastes. The truth may not make us comfortable, but it does make us free. And knowing and living the truth ennoble our lives. It is the only path to lasting happiness.” (p. 22)

So, it could be claimed that John Paul II, in writing The Splendor of Truth, confronted elite, Western culture and its problem with truth. This confrontation created a crisis, a fork in the road, for a decision had to be made. After 1993, especially Christians (and not just Roman Catholics), had to decide which path to follow: (1) go with the flow of truth being deconstructed into an infinite number of “truths,” or (2) stand with and for the truth (including moral truth).

With The Splendor of Truth in mind, it is interesting to consider recent United Methodist history. Since the Catholic document appeared in 1993, Rev. Adam Hamilton, the Kansas City pastor who is now a leading spokesman for the so-called “centrist” group known as Uniting Methodists, has gained great prominence. Years ago he became an advocate of going with the flow of elite Western culture. Especially his book Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White: Thoughts on Religion, Morality, and Politics (2008) turns significant moral matters related to human sexuality into matters to be decided by individual choice.

What is amazing to this pastor is that Rev. Hamilton wrote Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White while totally ignoring The Splendor of Truth. To be sure, Rev. Hamilton is a United Methodist pastor, not a Roman Catholic priest or theologian. Even so, for him to neglect the strongest, thickest, most philosophical, most deeply Christian witness to truth in the post-modern era is a major oversight at best or a purposeful, self-chosen neglect at worst. (And by the way, Dr. Bill T. Arnold’s Seeing Black & White in a Gray World: The Need for Theological Reasoning in the Church’s Debate over Sexuality [Seedbed, 2014] is a brilliant refutation of Rev. Hamilton’s book.)

Again, please read Archbp. Chaput’s summary of The Splendor of Truth: “Truth exists, whether we like it or not. We don’t create truth; we find it, and we have no power to change it to our tastes. The truth may not make us comfortable, but it does make us free. And knowing and living the truth ennoble our lives. It is the only path to lasting happiness.”

As has been said, as for me and my house, we will stand with The Splendor of Truth. “Seeing gray” on human sexuality and other moral matters seems to be the default position of elite Western culture. In this area, The United Methodist Church, following Rev. Adam Hamilton, should not strive to look as gray as the general culture.

St. John Paul II remains correct in his analysis: the truth, moral truth, is at stake. In contemporary United Methodist language, some things involve black and white. (PTS)♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

August 29, 2017

Greetings, Paul!

I trust your summer has gone well. We had a relatively quiet one here.

The latest issue of Lifewatch (September 1, 2017) is thoroughly engaging, as usual. In the page-one article on the “character flaw,” I am sure you are right about most pastors being unwilling or unable to teach human sexuality or church doctrine. But for some reason, I am not one of them. If you ask my people if I have ever preached or taught Biblical principles of sexuality—marital, premarital, extramarital, homosexual, etc.—they will probably smile and say, “Oh yes, and many times.”

And as for teaching The United Methodist Church’s doctrine, I actually made that one of our churches’ goals for 2017, putting that booklet I gave you last January in all the pews and asking people to pick it up during every worship service. You can see the weekly schedule, to date, is attached. We recently completed The Articles of Religion, and just this past Sunday began The Confession of Faith. Every week, right after The Apostles’ Creed, I find it exciting to introduce and present these items before we all read them together.

Actually, 2017, being the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, has been the perfect time to cover the Articles, since they are all rooted in the 16th century, Lutheran event. But after nearly eight months of using 16th century language, The Confession of Faith, in its 20th century language, feels like a breath of fresh air, if you know what I mean.

The most decisive letter of response to your First Things article, for me, was by Dr. David Watson on theological pluralism. I remember Rev. Charles Kerr, who brought me into The United Methodist Church and pointed me to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, talking about this quite a bit. He saw the capitulation to theological pluralism as United Methodism’s ultimate downfall.

Blessings in Christ,

Rev. Paul R. Crikelair, Pastor and Founding Lifewatch Advisory Board Member, Stroudsburg, PA

Rev. Crikelair, I forgive you for being a bit defensive about your exemplary teaching on United Methodist doctrine—when so many pastors do not even know where it is located. Keep up your excellent, faithful ministry! (PTS)

August 30, 2017

Dear Paul,

I have just read Lifewatch (September 1, 2017). It was very instructive, and I appreciate your defining and explaining the difference between heresy and schism, and how these concepts relate to your concerns about what is happening in what you call “The Disunited Methodist Church.” I had previously read your article on this subject in the May 2017 issue of First Things. Your characterization of what is occurring in The United Methodist Church in the United States seems to apply as well to the Episcopal Church (my denomination), especially as it concerns “the Church’s teaching on life, abortion, and human sexuality.”

I applaud your call for the laity and the clergy (the bishops included) to return to the fundamentals or foundations of the Church's faith. I must confess that I do not have high hopes for that happening. I wonder if we might be in the midst of yet another cultural and spiritual crisis that will have to be solved by something similar to what has happened throughout the history of the Church: St. Benedict's response in the 6th century, Martin Luther's response in the 16th century, the Great Awakenings in the 18th and 19th centuries in this country, or even John Wesley's attempt to reform the Church of England in the 18th century. When the Church submits to the cultural misdirection, it may be time to pull up stakes and return to the foundations. I have been impressed by Rod Dreher (Orthodox) and his Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation (Sentinel, 2017), Antony Anselm (Roman Catholic) and his Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture (Regenry, 2017), and Archbishop Charles J. Chaput (Roman Catholic) and his Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World (Henry Holt, 2017). Clearly, you are in good company with your concerns with what is happening to our culture and churches.

Keep up your good work.

Faithfully,

Dr. Watson A. Bowes, Jr./Emeritus Professor of
Obstetrics & Gynecology/University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill/Chapel Hill, NC

August 31, 2017

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed reading the responses to your article for First Things ("A Disunited Methodist Church," May 2017) in the Lifewatch newsletter (September 1, 2017).

I am very disappointed in Bishop Ken Carter's comments. He is very bright and conscientious. However, his comments betray a theological perspective which I think is the root cause of the crisis of The United Methodist Church. In his letter's questions, he shows that he does not understand that the Church itself is a culture, as George A. Lindbeck has demonstrated in The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Westminster Press, 1984). Bp. Carter leaves the impression that the "Church" offers a "culture religion," as Karl Barth called it, that adapts to its surroundings wherever it is. Then, in his positive vision, it is clear for him that "Church" is a collection of individuals who have "a deep and rich experience of grace" and who "move toward a life of holiness."

But what then becomes of the Church as the messianic People of God called out by the proclamation of the gospel that is a concrete message about divine revelation concerning what to believe and how to behave?

No wonder the bishop prefers "generous orthodoxy" to the "apostolic and catholic faith." The adjective has a latitudinarian ring to it, in my perception. I had hoped Bp. Carter had a much more ecclesial understanding of issues, but this sounds too much like the old liberal theology of "experience" and moralism and individualism, which are the

cause of the depletion of Methodist thought and spirit.

If Bp. Carter is correct that most United Methodists agree with him, there is no hope for the reform of The United Methodist Church and its rescue from mainline Protestantism. Whatever happens, God's Church will survive and thrive.

Sincerely,

An Anonymous United Methodist

Lifewatch would gladly welcome and publish a response from Bp. Carter. During these days of decision, this kind of substantive, theological debate is essential to The United Methodist Church, the Council of Bishops, and the Commission on a Way Forward. (PTS)

September 2, 2017

Rev. Paul:

I have just read the September 1, 2017 issue of Lifewatch and wish to compliment you on your bold and courageous stance on preserving the future of The United Methodist Church.

If possible, please mail me 8 additional copies so I can enlighten clergy and laity here in west central Kansas....

Thanks for your commitment to the Church. May God bless you in your future endeavors.

—Mr. Lee Musil/Great Bend, KS

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Your support for the witness of Lifewatch—including your prayers, your emails and letters and calls, and your financial gifts—is essential to sustain our witness for the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church and beyond. A gift to Lifewatch can be given in three ways. First, you can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. And third, if you are over the age of 70-1/2, you may give a gift from your IRA as a tax-free distribution. (This means a gift [up to \$100,000...!] can be transferred from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and can count toward your minimum required distribution without being considered as taxable income.) If you are considering an IRA gift, please first communicate with Mrs. Evans in the Lifewatch office. And know that Mrs. Evans and I are grateful, in a heartfelt way, for your support of all kinds. (PTS)

- "It is also in killing black people that Planned Parenthood really shines. Around 941 black babies are aborted in this country every day. Planned Parenthood, netting more than a third of the abortion market in the country, is responsible for 329 of those daily deaths. That averages out to a little more than 120,000 black abortions at Planned Parenthood per year, or around a third of the total abortions the organization performs—this from a demographic that makes up about 13 percent of the United States population. According to the Guttmacher Institute, black women get abortions at *five times* the rate of white women. (emphasis in the original)

"If you were a white supremacist who wanted to sharply reduce the black population to make way for more whites,

what would you be doing differently than Planned Parenthood?”

These comments are from Daniel Payne’s article “If We’re Tearing Down White Supremacy, Start with Planned Parenthood” (August 15, 2017, <http://thefederalist.com/2017/08/15/tearing-white-supremacy-start-planned-parenthood/>, accessed on 08/17/17)

● Here’s some inside baseball. A certain style of doing theology seems to be surrounding the Commission on a Way Forward. Bishop Ken Carter, one of the three bishops who is moderating the Commission, calls it “generous orthodoxy.” As a matter of fact, he has written a thoughtful editorial entitled “Generous Orthodoxy” that can be goggled, located, and read on the web. Unfortunately, I believe that Bp. Carter’s generosity overruns his orthodoxy—that is, what he understands as love is allowed to erode what he takes to be the Church’s faith (doctrine and morals). It seems to this United Methodist pastor that the theology known as generous orthodoxy simply does not have the structure and strength to stand up against the pressing demands for revision and choice—not only in the area of moral teaching on human sexuality, but also in other areas as well.

If not generous orthodoxy, what? Evangelical catholicism. Evangelical catholicism is a way of doing theology that has been in Lutheran life in the United States for years. Think Richard John Neuhaus. Think Robert Jenson. Think Carl Braaten. Think Pro Ecclesia. Remember that Albert Outler once called John Wesley an “evangelical catholic.” Remember that, for years, Duke Divinity School aspired to offer a theological education that could be called “evangelical catholic.” Evangelical catholicism seems stronger, tougher, more decisive, and better suited to withstand the challenges of our age—which want to turn truth into choices, to avoid hurting anyone’s feelings.

“Evangelical catholicism might lack the public-relations appeal, but in the long run it can help fortify The United Methodist Church to sit up, stand up, and step up during this very challenging era.”

Generous orthodoxy has a nice ring, but it will not help The United Methodist Church to stand firm in her doctrine and discipline. Evangelical catholicism might lack the public-relations appeal, but in the long run it can help fortify The United Methodist Church to sit up, stand up, and step up during this very challenging era.

● Today articles on the past, present, and future of The United Methodist Church generate many responses that call the denomination “diseased” or “dysfunctional.” If a denomination can indeed be diseased or dysfunctional, it stands to reason that a congregation can be healthy. That is the argument of The Reverend Dr. John Marshall Crowe, an elder in The United Methodist Church and a member of the North Carolina Conference, who has recently written Church Health in the Twenty-First Century: A Biblical Approach (eLectio Publishing, Little Elm, TX, 2017).

Church Health in the Twenty-First Century is a welcome relief from literature on the congregation composed by management gurus, organizational experts, and psychological analysts. It is theological! It is Biblical! And it is unapologetically, unembarrassedly ecclesiological! (Can you tell that this reviewer wants to stand up and cheer?) It is accurate to say that this is a book on practical, congregational,

ORDER FORM: I wish to order: ___ copies of **THE RIGHT CHOICE: Pro-Life Sermons** (\$12.00/copy); ___ copies of **THE CHURCH AND ABORTION: In Search of New Ground for Response** (\$5.00/copy); ___ copies of **THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT ABORTION** (\$7.00/copy); ___ copies of **HOLY ABORTION?: A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice** (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of **THE JERICHO PLAN: Breaking Down the Walls Which Prevent Post-Abortion Healing** (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of **A LOVE FOR LIFE: Christianity’s Consistent Protection of the Unborn** (\$10.00/copy); ___ copies of **30 DAYS FOR LIFE: A Prayer Devotional** (\$2.00/copy); and ___ copies of **THEOLOGY OF THE BODY SEMINAR** (Dr. Paul J. Griffiths)(\$10.00/DVD set). Prices include shipping.

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or pastoral ecclesiology. Truly, it is useful—especially for the aspiring or new pastor.

Dr. Crowe rightly sees, with Biblical eyes, that the Church is indeed the Body of Jesus Christ in this world (and under His Headship), and thrives only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Further Biblical teaching and denominational doctrine increase the health of the local church. (Not surprisingly, deprivation of such teaching and doctrine sickens the local body.) When such teaching and doctrine influence the weekly preaching in a local church, its health is greatly enhanced.

Church Health in the Twenty-First Century describes what a healthy church actually looks and acts like—through the use of physiological categories (e.g., musculoskeletal system, nervous system, circulatory system, and skin). Quotations from the Bible, from the Church’s tradition, and from an array of contemporary pastors, professors, and theologians contribute to the cause. Practical pastoral suggestions abound, and many pastoral “land mines” are uncovered. The book ends with a special emphasis on life together, in the congregation, with the mentally ill.

Dr. Crowe’s book would make for lively discussion among pastors in covenant-group meetings. It could also be read and studied by the lay leaders of a local church with their pastor. It is available from Amazon and Barnes &

Noble. Strongly recommended for this time and place in United Methodist life, when the congregation is generally misunderstood as just another voluntary organization.

- Dr. Olga Fairfax, who years ago stood almost alone to hold up the pro-life banner within The United Methodist Church, wrote the following memorable comment in a recent letter: “Does my family reflect America’s decrease in the number of off-spring? My grandmother had three children, my mother had two, I have one adopted child, and she doesn’t have or want any! Sad. America, weep for your children.”

- “C.S. Lewis wrote that the Real is that which says to us, ‘Your preferences have not been considered.’” (Paul Mankowski’s “Waugh on the Merits,” First Things, October 2017, pp. 58-59)

- *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* “Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.”♥

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